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Historic stacks fall today

By *EVE BYRON - Independent Record - 08/14/09*

The public is reminded that road closures will be in place this morning around the Asarco's lead smelter in East Helena, generally from 6:30 until 8 a.m., while the plant's three smoke stacks are blown up.

The blast is scheduled to take place at 7:30 a.m. Friday.

Three minutes prior to the blast, a series of long, audible warning signals sound off. The blast signal is sounded one minute prior to the blast, and verbal notification to the public in the viewing area near the water tower, south of the smelting plant, will be given by a patrol car loud speaker.

After the blast, a safety inspection will be conducted. Once the clear is given, the roads will be reopened.

A viewing area has been set up south of the plant on Highway 282. People are asked to stay on the road and out of the farmer's field so they don't destroy his crops. The area is slightly elevated, and should provide a good view of the stack demolition. Another good viewing location is near the microwave towers to the southeast.

The road from the north to the viewing area, Highway 282, will be closed beginning at 6:30 a.m. The area can be accessed from Helena by taking Colonial Drive south to its intersection with South Hills Drive/Highway 282, and turn north.

Anticipated closures include:

A section of Highway 282, from 300 feet south of Highway 12 near the Manlove Road turnoff and generally along the smelter's western boundary;

Smelter Road south and west of the smelter, including the stretch that leads to the Hidden Valley residences;

A spur road that leads off Highway 518 near the eastern edge of the plant site.

The blast will be postponed if winds are stronger than 5 mph or if lightning is present. Demolition expert Chester Grace adds that if it looks like the weather may turn bad, the stacks could go as early as 7 a.m.

Highway 12 will remain open, but no parking is allowed there. Highway 518, which runs past the Kleffner Ranch, also will be open.

The Independent Record plans to stream the demolition live on its Web site at helenair.com and Twitter updates also will be available shortly after 6 a.m.

The three towers reach 200, 400 and 425 feet into the air, and will be laid down on their sides with hundreds of pounds of explosives. The smallest stack was constructed of brick between 1910 and 1920; the 400-foot concrete stack was built in the late 1930s; and the tallest concrete structure was erected in 1981.

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